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AUTHOR Stock, Janet C.
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ABSTRACT

Some of the literature on the role of teaching culture in second language instruction is reviewed, with some emphasis on the work of Ortunio and the Kluckholn model of French culture. One instructor's use of French print and television advertising to teach French culture is described. Values such as intellectuality, traditionalism, and patriotism are cited. The teaching approaches include examining a large number of issues to identify appropriate ads, discussing with the class how advertisers appeal to consumers with both open and covert messages, and sensitizing students to hidden promises of the ads. Small group discussions among the students focus on specific French qualities or values to which the ads appeal. Differences between French and American ads are also discussed. (LB)

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TEACHING CULTURE THROUGH ADVERTISING

by

Janet C. Stock
Utah State University

More and more foreign language teachers are emphasizing the importance of teaching culture as well as language in the classroom. Omaggio (1986) has pointed out that knowing a language is more than just knowing its grammatical system. In order to communicate we must also know the patterns of living, acting, reacting, seeing, and explaining the world in which the language is spoken (p. 359). Thus French or any other language must not be viewed by the teacher or communicated to the students as a "code" or alternate form for English. It must be viewed as a totally separate way of reacting to the reality of the people who speak it and as such it is the product of the culture in which those people live. Communicating in the language includes knowing these patterns of living.

Yet the importance of learning culture goes beyond the need to communicate in the language. It can be the very foundation for creating a "new world order" as President Bush put it. Ortunio (1991) has noted that the enculturation process that goes on in any society is a process in which the values and behavioral patterns of a group are developed. This process, while strengthening common bonds between individuals in the society, also creates an ethnocentrism or sense of superiority over other cultures with differing values and behavior patterns, and this unrestrained enthnocentrism can lead to prejudice, hatred, oppression, and even war (p. 449). She urges foreign language

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educators to instill a sense of cross-cultural awareness in students by providing them with the means of identifying their own cultural values and also of recognizing the diversity of methods by which different groups approach the problems of life.

No where is this more vital than in the teaching of a business language course. Since the business world of any society is a product of the culture of that society, it is vitally important that the students in business French, Spanish, German, etc. learn not only the specialized vocabulary used in the language and the specific business practices of the country, but also the basic attitudes, world view, and living patterns that underly these practices. American business executives tend to view foreign businesses as imitations of their own with perhaps minor variations rather than as expressions of very different cultures. The result of this ethnocentric bias has, as we all know, had a disastrous effect on American businesses' ability to sell their products abroad and consequently on the American economy.

Uber and Grosse (1991) suggest that culture should be an integral part of the business French course. They have noted three levels of culture which need to be addressed in the business language course: the basic or economic level, the socio-economic level and the patterns of living in a culture. Thus at the basic level, topics such as the stock market, the balance of payments, the tax structure, the categorization of companies, and so on would be included. At the socio-economic

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level, broader topics such as marketing, advertising, the postal service, transportation, political parties, social classes, education, and would also be included. At the third level, topics such as the everyday life of the people, the family unit, eating patterns, etc. would be discussed. They note that most business French texts present little if any information about the French people and their patterns of living. They suggest that the business language course be supplemented to cover the basic living patterns of the people (p. 247).

Since the time constraints in a business French course are so severe (so many topics, so little time!) especially in a university on the quarter system, I propose to combine the teaching of advertising with the teaching of these basic patterns of living. If we view the French business as an expression of the culture that produced it, and we remember that it must sell its product or its service to the other members of that culture in order to stay in business, then the chief means by which it sells that product or service, its advertising, must appeal to the people in that culture. Thus if we examine the "message" contained within individual ads, whether or not this message is stated, we can learn a great deal about the culture in which the business is operating.

In order to help the students examine the "message" in an ad we as teachers must be aware of those aspects of the culture that are likely to be expressed in the ads. Ortunio used the Kluckhohn model for identifying five aspects of culture that are

common to all human groups:

1. the perception of human nature--the self and others,
2. the world view--man's relation to nature,
3. the temporal orientation--the importance of time,
4. the forms of activity engaged in by the group, and
5. the social relation within the group.

She further defines these categories by their range of variations. Thus a society's view of human nature may range from the belief that it is evil, to neutral, to good, from changeable to unchangeable. Man's relation to nature may range from man's subjugation to nature, his harmony with nature, to his mastery over nature. The view of time may range from orientation to the past or tradition bound, the present or situational bound, to the future or goal oriented. The view of activity may range from a sense of "being" which deemphasizes personal achievement, a sense of "being-in-becoming" which stresses inner development, to a sense of "doing"-action oriented effort rewarded by success. Social relations or activities may be organized and directed by lineality--the authoritative chain of command, by colaterality--collective decisions, or by individuality--personal autonomy (pp. 449-450). Nostrand (1967) has noted that the French culture is based on 12 themes: individualism, intellectuality, the art of living, realism, common sense, friendship, love, family, justice, liberty, patriotism and traditionalism (Uber and Grosse, p. 250). To these I would add elitism. Thus the French culture may be placed on the Kluckholn model as follows:

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1. Human nature is viewed as flawed but changeable--neutral (thus the realism and common sense).
2. Man is viewed as having mastery over nature but also living in harmony with nature (thus the traditionalism and interest in conserving natural resources and also the interest in technological advances).
3. The time orientation is toward the past with some goal orientation to the future (thus the emphasis on the family, traditionalism, patriotism, as well as an interest in high technology).
4. The activities result from a sense of being-in-becoming stressing inner development (thus the intellectuality, art of living, friendship, love, elitism).
5. The social relations are directed by both lineality--authoritative chain of command (traditionalism) and also by individualism--personal autonomy (hence the liberty, individualism).

These then are some of the values underlying the French culture, values that will be expressed in French advertising. In my class, I have used ads in the French print media as my source of materials but I am also planning to use TV ads in the future. I use the Paris Match and Express because these are the magazines available to me. They are also very good because they are aimed at the general French public. I first examine a large number of issues to find the ads I want to use. I discuss with the class how advertisers appeal to the consumers with both open and covert

messages, and how they frequently imply rather than state the content of the message. I try to sensitize the students to the hidden promises in the ads using several ads as examples. Then I divide the class into groups and give each group one or more magazines with the ad/ads they are to analyze indicated. I ask the groups to analyze the hidden message in the ad, to examine what the advertiser is promising to do for the customer with his product or service. Then I have each group present its findings to the class. As the students present their own conclusions, I discuss with them what qualities or values of the French people these ads appeal to, why a Frenchman would want to buy this product or use this service. I also discuss how they differ from or are similar to American ads for similar products/services. Then I discuss with the class the general differences between French advertising and American advertising.

The next time I teach the class, I am planning to use TV ads as well. I will use as my source materials the France Panorama series which includes ads taken from French TV. These ads tend to be very current although they have been selected for their entertainment value. Still they represent the kinds of values that the French people hold dear, the values that represent the culture as a whole. They also tend to be very visual thus reducing the need to understand the language in the ads.

I will prepare pre-listening activities in which I will describe for the students the situations to be presented in the ads and the products to be advertised. I will tell them to try

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to determine what effect the ads have on them. Would they or would they not want to buy this product, use this service , and why. After viewing the tape, I will discuss the student responses to the ad. Then I will discuss with them why a French person might be motivated by this ad (as I do with the print material). I will discuss with them the differences in French and American advertising and the reasons behind them. I will discuss such questions as why do French ads generally avoid the direct hard sell approach that we find on American TV? What does this tell us about the French attitude towards selling and making money in general? Could it be that the French subconsciously are still influenced by the Catholic Church's condemnation of making money or getting rich as morally wrong? Why are personal care products especially deodorants, mouthwashes, etc. rarely advertised on TV and when they are no mention is made of the "unpleasant" odors they mask? Could it be that the French are less concerned with the "offending" natural odors and more concerned with pleasing ones found in perfumes? Why do French food ads tend to stress the quality and good taste of the product, the love and admiration it will bring to the cook, rather than the speed and ease of its preparation, its low cost, its practicality or health factors (low salt, low fat, low cholesterol)? Could it be that the French people are more concerned with eating "well" than eating "fast" or "cheap" and that the French are less concerned about their weight and physical fitness than Americans? Could it be because obesity is

rare, their cholesterol levels are not generally excessively high nor is heart disease a serious problem for them? Why are pills for headache, sleeplessness, gastric distress, nervous tension, cold and flu, etc., etc., etc., seldom if ever advertised? Might it be because the French do not take pills for minor ailments as a general rule. They prefer natural remedies to popping pills for these problems. Why do car ads tend to emphasize sexuality, individuality, freedom, power, masculinity, rather than affordability, practicality, etc. as in many (though certainly not all) American ads? What does a car mean to the Frenchman? Is it a means of transportation or an expression of his personality? (examples of ads from magazines and video tape to be presented here)

After lengthy discussions of several ads and their appeal, I will give the students assignments to write ads which would appeal to the French public. They might be assigned to rewrite existing American ads to make the product or service more appealing to a French audience or they might imagine a French company advertising to its customers. I will then videotape these student produced-ads and discuss them with the class again.

Thus many cultural topics can be addressed through an analysis of the advertising of French businesses to their French customers. A study of advertising that goes beyond the usual analysis of the various types of advertising but actually examines the ads themselves can reveal significant information about not only the economic and socio-economic levels of culture

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but also the patterns of living, the values, family life, eating customs, shopping, and so on. Even the deeper more underlying aspects of culture such a world view, time orientation, perception of self, attitudes toward nature can be explored. Care must be taken of course to show the diversity in the culture and avoid reinforcing stereo-typical images of the "cheese-eating, wine-guzzling, French chauvinist". If it is done with care and sensitivity, the study of advertising in the business-French course can encourage the students to become multi-cultural as well as multi-lingual people. As Wells (1991) has pointed out "A multi-culturally educated person is essential in our technological, political, and economic global village" (p. 14).

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